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SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL/PHD AND INR/AA
ACCRA ALSO FOR WARP
GENEVA FOR RMA
LISBON ALSO FOR DAO
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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PU](#) [SG](#)
SUBJECT: CASAMANCE: CHIEF REBEL STRONGER THAN ANTICIPATED

REF: DAKAR 1004

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SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Beginning in mid-March the Bissau-Guinean military lent a helping hand to Senegal, putting into execution its threat to cleanse the border area of Movement of Democratic Forces of the Casamance (MFDC) recalcitrant Salif Sadio and his supporters. Bissau-Guinean troops have succeeded in purging villages that harbored Sadio's men, his supporters and their families both east and west areas of Sao Domingos, Guinea-Bissau. It is not clear, however, how much Sadio has been weakened by this operation. He has redeployed to regain positions he was forced to abandon in the Sindian area of the northern Casamance near The Gambia. Casamancais are frustrated by the situation of "no war, no peace" but the move to attack Sadio, with extensive media coverage, has not provided the boost to the peace process that the GOS and GOGB had anticipated. END SUMMARY.

IMPACT OF BISSAU-GUINEAN INTERVENTION LIMITED

2. (SBU) General Baptista Tagme na Waie, the Chief of Staff of Guinea-Bissau's armed forces, announced two months ago to Senegalese negotiators in the Casamance peace process that removing Sadio as an element of the Casamance puzzle is the only way to find a solution. Guinea-Bissau deployed hundreds of soldiers and shelled Sadio's main positions located in the forests near the border, east and west of Sao Domingos at Baraca Mandioca, Bazere, Koumere, Kassou and four other locations. An Embassy contact indicated that Sadio's counter-attack against Sao Domingos was launched by his elite troops in Bazere (north-east of Sao Domingos), and it is those troops who mined the road from Sao Domingos to Varela, where a Bissau-Guinean passenger vehicle was destroyed by a land mine with 11 deaths. It seems that the Bissau-Guinean attacks have deprived Sadio of his safe havens in Guinea-Bissau. However, the intervention seems to have realigned forces.

RADICAL TROOPS RECONQUER OLD POSITIONS

3. (SBU) To avoid a concentration of troops under Bissau-Guinean attack, Sadio's men fled to the Sindian area,

north of Ziguinchor. During the weekend of April 23, they attacked a Senegalese army position in Nyassia, to make sure that these soldiers would not move while their men were crossing towards the north to escape the Bissau-Guinean forces. A few months ago, Sadio's commanders had been driven from the same area by younger leaders who were more open to the peace process, but it seems the Bissau-Guinean attack may have enhanced MFDC solidarity around Sadio, whose men have recaptured the MFDC bases of Kadialouck, Tambaf and Petit Banlandine in the Sindian area. On April 25, an Embassy source indicated there were exchanges of fire in the area and it is probable that Sadio's men have captured the fourth MFDC base at Keurounor.

CIVILIANS ARE CONCERNED

14. (SBU) So far there is no movement of refugees or IDPS except those noted previously in Guinea-Bissau and Ziguinchor. As long as the fighting is limited to factions within the rebellion, most Casamancais villagers appear to have confidence that traditional mechanisms will work to regulate the conflict. Their main fear is a return of the Senegalese army, which would entail villages being caught between two sides and conflict of allegiances between the nation and the ethnic group.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) The intervention of Bissau-Guinean troops with the blessing of Senegalese authorities has not resulted in the surgical operation to extirpate Sadio that was anticipated. It has, however, driven enemy rebel forces back to the Sindian area. There is a potential danger that if they fail to lay aside their arms, the Senegalese military may be forced to return to the area to restore law and order. To avoid such escalation, there is a move

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among Casamance leaders close to Sadio to push for a return to the step-by-step approach to peace that allowed the area to remain stable for the last three years.

16. (SBU) Embassy notes that the GOS's continuing failure to provide regular, reliable air service from Dakar to Ziguinchor or Cap Skirring has also fanned Casamance anger and renewed allegations that President Wade and his government do not care about the Casamance. Recent violence in the area may yet bring Senegalese authorities to focus more on the Casamance, despite their preparation for 2007 elections. END COMMENT.

JACOBS